

A SHORT REHEARSAL
OF THE SAD CONDITION OF THREE OF
THE CHILDREN OF
JOHN BALDWIN OF SARRET.

A Short Rehearsal of the
Sad Condition of three of the Children
of
John Baldwin of Sarret
in the County of Hertford,
AND ALSO THE MANNER OF THEIR DELIVERANCE
1717.



The Parents' evidence together with a summary of the
testimonies of the children and friends and
a brief introductory note by

W. B. GERISH.

BISHOPS' STORTFORD.
1915.

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J. A. Lowell fund

INTRODUCTORY.

WHEN Thomas Aldridge, of Tring, essayed "to set forth in a rustic but faithful narrative the deplorable case of the children of John Baldwin, of Sarret, with the manner of their recovery," he did so, he stated in the "Preface to the Reader," because he "was several times desired by the father of the children and told by him that it was desired by several others also and pressed by his own mind, when he found no others would, as he thought the writing of the account might be a matter of comfort and profit and that it might be made of some good use if lent to some other Christians to peruse who have lent their assistance to what he had undertaken." However, he died without the narrative seeing light and it was not until two years after his death that the pamphlet appeared.

The events set forth appear to have taken place in 1706 and earlier and the compiler also thought it desirable to add an "Appendix" of eleven pages dealing with other unusual cases of the healing of mental and bodily complaints by mental suggestion. The local cases are that of David Wright, of Offley, cured of the Kings Evil,¹ Isaac Tockfield, of Tring Magna, cured of fits,² Thomas Burrige, of Market Street (Markyate, near Flamstead), also cured of fits.³

The case of the three daughters of John and Rebecca Baldwin, Anne, born in 1686, Rebecca, born in 1688, and Mary, born in 1690 (a fourth daughter, Elizabeth, born in 1684, was unaffected), may be briefly described as paroxysms accompanied by hallucinations and mental duality. These features have been so thoroughly described in the Introductory to "A relation of Mary Hall, of Gadsden, reputed to be possessed of two devils" 1664 (reprinted 1912) that it would be mere supererogation to deal with them here.

1. See "Hertfordshire Notes and Queries," Oct. 18th, and Nov. 15th, 1913.

2 & 3. See "Hertfordshire Archæological Notes and Queries," Nov. 5th, 1910.

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It may, however, be reasserted that the form of religious mania largely, if not entirely confined to young people of both sexes,—the female predominating—was probably the result of ill-health, accentuated by mental stress brought about by the personal application of the doctrines set forth by the Calvinists.

A characteristic of what may be termed demonomania is, that, intimately connected with what may be termed change of personality, is debasement of the moral character, and we find extreme hatred of and aversion to, all forms of religious exercise exhibited, but perhaps through the force of mental suggestion, persistence in such exercises eventually compels a return of the afflicted person to a normal state.

Maudsley in his "Pathology of the Mind" 1879, under the head of "The Insanity of Pubescence," says:—

" . . . The developement of puberty is now and then the occasion of an outbreak of mental disorder, especially where there is a strong predisposition to such disorder. . . . The attacks of mental excitement may be paroxysmal, the person being apparently quite well between them, and they are sometimes accompanied by movements which seem to be of a quasi-spasmodic or choreic nature, such as a continuous jerking of the body in a peculiar way, strange motions of the hands and arms, an extraordinary grimacing, fits of crawling on the floor, quasi-somnambulistic seizures and the like. In other cases the symptoms are those of melancholia. The person weeps without apparent reason . . . tears clothing in a seemingly wilful and perverse way and perhaps makes objectless starts away from home or absurd and bungling attempts at suicide. . . . Where hereditary predisposition is strong and of a bad type, the disease may go on from year to year until it passes into dementia; a dementia, however, which differs from ordinary dementia in the evidence which there is for a long time of clear understanding if the person can only be moved to exercise it."

The combined testimony of the parents and uncle has been reprinted in full, that of the individual parents, daughters and friends has been summarised. In every case there seems no reason

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to doubt their sincerity. Imagination is, however, a very potent factor in such cases as witnessed in the instance of "Trial by Ordeal in Hertfordshire" (reprinted in the Hertfordshire Folk Lore series), where, two unimpeachable witnesses gave evidence of occurrences which could not possibly have taken place. Labouring under the stress of nervous anticipation they fancied they saw what probably they expected to see, and the manifestations of the Baldwin girls come under this category. Muscular convulsions are of course characteristic of certain forms of epilepsy or St. Vitus dance, but with the Baldwins they were mere neurotic manifestations of a remarkably contagious character and over these the influence of soothing words and the earnest demeanour of friends had a remarkable effect. This form of healing by mental suggestion is well known.

It only remains to add that the parents did not long survive their trying experiences. By the kindness of the Rector of Sarratt, we learn that "John Baldwin ye old" was "buried from Newhouse February 5th, 1719," and "Rebecca wife of John Baldwin of Newhouse was buried March 3rd, 1717." Of the children, Anne married George Essex on April 22nd, 1727; Rebecca, who does not appear to have married, was buried September 18th, 1713; with regard to Mary the records are silent, and Elizabeth married William Costern of Rickmansworth, bricklayer, on July 4th, 1709, by whom she had several children, and on May 13th, 1755, "Widdow Coster" was buried.

W. B. GERISH.



A SHORT REHEARSAL OF THE SAD CONDITION
OF THREE OF THE CHILDREN OF JOHN BALDWIN
of Sarret, in the County of Hertford, and also
the manner of their Deliverance.

The joint testimony of the Father, Mother, and Uncle concerning the condition their three children were in at the time of their disorders.

Ours has been an afflicted family several years ; for we had a poor sister in a strange condition for years before she died ; and, since that, three of the children (tho' not all together) have been in a very sad condition for a great while, which made our lives uncomfortable, and laid us under great discouragements ; and thro' the charge and hindrances we were at and met with thereby, we have been much impoverish'd, as to the things of this world, yet we were willing to keep our condition, in some measure, private, because we had some reason to fear we should be more derided than pitied, and accounted, by some, worse than any others, because our afflictions were so strange.

But now we are willing to let some persons know (who are sober) how it was with us, and that, we hope, may be stirr'd up thereby to praise God with us, for his mercies to us, and to pray for their continuance ; and in giving this account we will be as brief as we can with conveniency, not willingly omitting circumstances that were weighty, and that are fit to be published, where we will always endeavour to speak rather less than more than we know to be true, omitting what is doubtful to any of us, by reason of the length of time and also many things that may seem but little, compar'd with other things therein related. And

I. As to Rebecca Baldwin, she was born December 18th, 1688, and as near as we can remember, she was taken ill about

February, 1700, and it also appears that she was ill at that time by the date of Dr. Parker's bill, who we made use of for her soon after she began to be out of order.

As to the condition she was in, as we remember, she was first taken with a great pain in her sides, which held her for some time; after that with a gaping and shaking, which would hold her a great part of a day together sometimes; and sometimes one arm would shake, sometimes the other; sometimes one leg, sometimes the other; sometimes she was taken with fainting fits and fainted away, and froth at the mouth and her tongue turn about in a strange manner; and one day she made a strange humming noise, much like a bumble-bee; after that mew'd like a kitten and so louder and louder until like unto a cat; then fell a barking like unto a small dog, and that louder and louder, at last so eagerly that she could scarce fetch her breath, and continued so doing until night.

She also had other kind of fits, in which, if she was near the fire, she would be ready to sink down into it, and sometimes it would be said by her mouth "I'll burn ye," and then it was hard work to hold her, so as to keep her out of the fire; then she also striv'd to beat herself with her hands very much. Thus she continued 'till about December, 1701, as appears by Dr. Parker's last bill, during which time she was sometimes free from those fits for several days together, and then was followed with them again several times in a day, for several days one after another. Hereupon, not finding help we left Dr. Parker and after some little time went to Dr. Woodhouse, and, having made use of him three or four times, her fits ceased, and she continued well as to them a considerable time; perhaps it might be between a quarter and half a year, but we cannot tell strictly how long.

II. Mary Baldwin was born June 17th, 1690, and was, as near as we remember, taken ill about October, 1702, first with a great pain in her side; after some time that wore off but then she would be dumb, sometimes for a great part of the day together, sometimes perhaps half an hour; sometimes she would fall a whining, sometimes

a singing, sometimes laughing in a very strange manner, for perhaps a quarter of an hour, sometimes more, and says she saw the appearance of several men and women and call'd them by their names, but we saw nothing of them ; sometimes she would be blind for perhaps a quarter or half an hour together ; and sometimes before her sight was taken away, it would be said by her mouth "Now she shall be blind," and then it would be so.

After Mary had been in this condition some little time, Rebecca fell into the same, or a worse condition than she was in before, and then we had a very sore hand with them both ; but Mary was the worst of the two, her fits being strongest ; sometimes the use of her limbs was taken away, and she could not go at all, and on a sudden she could go and run as well as at any time before her illness ; once she could go no way but backward for two or three days together, another time she could not go without crutches for two or three weeks together ; sometimes she could not lift up her hands to her mouth and would say she should be starved, so that we were forced to help her ; sometimes she would shriek out and say she saw several men and women naming some of them ; and Rebecca would also say she saw them at the same time with her. Sometimes one of them would fall down in the house and lie as though she was in a swoon or dying and froth at the mouth, and sometimes the other ; and sometimes before one of them fell down, it would be said by her mouth "Now she shall fall down," and then so she did and there lie like one in a swoon and froth at the mouth and her tongue turn about in her mouth very strangely for a considerable time ; and then when she got up, it would be said by the other's mouth "Now she shall fall down," then she would do as the other did, and thus it would be several times in a day some days.

When they were in this condition, we made use of Dr. Woodhouse again for a considerable time, but they both remained in the same condition, only sometimes they were better for a week or two, and then as bad again as before ; we then put them out to

William Brewer's, of Sarret, where they were about three or four weeks, and although they were well when abroad, they were in the same condition if they went but to come home and when they were come home again; hereupon they were asked by one of us if we should get them prayed for, naming some persons to them. They were willing, and Rebecca said she should be well if we could get persons to pray, and we promised them that we would if we could, and Rebecca mended from that time. It was agreed upon to get persons to pray for them, but Mary continued in the same condition, having fits as before. Soon after this several persons were spoken to, who, in a little time after, met, with several others at Richard Carter's at Chipperfield, in the County aforesaid (where we were with both the children) and spent part of the day in prayer with fasting, Mary being near all the time dumb that was spent in prayer. Before the persons prayed, they agreed to meet again that day two weeks, upon that and some other accounts, with this alteration, that they would spend part of that day, either in prayer or thanksgiving, upon the account of the children, according as the Lord should be pleased to deal with them in the mean time; between which times Rebecca continued well as to fits, except some few threats of them returning, though she was under some other illness, but not great, and Mary was better as to the fits; and she was better also after keeping part of the second day, but not well.

But Rebecca remained well as to her fits, for aught we remember, but we cannot say that she was yet wholly free from other illness of body.

After some time a day of thanksgiving was kept at the same place upon some other accounts, and upon this of ours, that God had greatly eased, though not wholly delivered from this sore affliction; this was December the 28th, 1703, Rebecca continuing well as to fits and Mary much better, we desired that a Meeting might be kept at our house, and to that end entered our house (as the law directs) at the Quarter Sessions held at St. Albans, April 27th, 1704, and obtained an opportunity the 19th of May following, which we

spent in thanksgiving unto God for what He had done and in prayer that He would complete the work ; and from that very day Mary has continued well as to those sad fits before-mentioned, except some few sudden very short shakes within a little time afterwards, from which also she hath been preserved from near that time. And Rebecca hath not only been well as to her fits, ever since we agreed to get persons to pray for them, but hath also been very well in bodily health for a long time ; and Mary hath not only been free from those sad fits from the very day, but also from the threatenings of their returning from within a little time afterwards, and hath been in bodily health for a great part of the time since, and both are so at this time, praised be the Lord, and that without the use of any other means besides prayer unto God, reading and hearing His Word, since we left going to Dr. Woodhouse, which we judge, by some circumstances, was about November, 1703, which is now about two years and nine months since.

But our afflictions of this kind did not end here, for Anne Baldwin, who was born April 15th, 1686, was taken, as we thought, with an ague about April, 1704, which continued till about July following, and then she fell into much such fits and sad condition as her two sisters before-mentioned had been in before her. Sometimes she was dumb, sometimes strangely shook, sometimes her arms would be snatched about, sometimes her head shook and her face turned to one shoulder, sometimes to the other ; and when she hath been in bed hath been tossed from one side to the other, a great pace in a strange manner ; sometimes rolled about in the bed as though rocking in a cradle, and that so strongly that it was hard for one, if not two, to hold her still.

Sometimes she would walk very strangely in her fits, and when a Bible hath been held to her to read, or try to read therein, it hath been said by her mouth "I can't endure it, I will tear it" and such like expressions, yet by her trying to read in the Bible her fits have gone.

And when she has been dumb, we have held a Bible to her, and she having read with her mind, she hath spoken again in a short time ; but still those sad fits continued strong and came often upon her. And we had obtained an agreement from several persons to keep part of a day in fasting with prayer at our house upon her account, at which she was much discontented in her fits, though willing to it at other times. But through some misunderstandings among the persons who we expected to meet at that time, there was only two of them came, and one of them came not to keep the day, but to acquaint us that through a mistake that happened among the persons, there would be a disappointment and we must not expect them that day ; yet they two spent some time in prayer to God with us (though we were unfit to keep it as a fast) and then agreed to take care to fix upon another time as soon as they could advise with others about it ; and it was agreed upon in a short time to meet and spend part of the 18th of August, 1704, in prayer and fasting at our house, upon the account of this "poor girl." Between this time (which was August the 4th) and the 18th of August, her fits continued strong, and when in them she seemed to rejoice at the former disappointment and also to be much concerned at this new agreement, wishing their horses might throw them, and again sometimes that they might lose their way, and manifesting great concern about how she should be able to go through that day ; and one day it was said by her mouth to her mother "I'll rest that I may be strong to overcome them and then I will stay." On the 17th of August she was in a sad condition most part of the day, being grievously discontented and restless, so that we were forced to hold her ; which day we understand since, was spent part of it by one person in prayer, with fasting in private for preparation for the morrow.

August the 18th, 1704, in the morning several persons met at our house, where both they and we, with our family, spent part of the day in fasting, and several of the persons that came, prayed and exhorted the rest of us to join with them in their desires to God.

In the former part of the opportunity (though the poor maid was willing and agreed to endeavour to keep the day with us) yet she in some little time began to be bad with fits and grew greatly discontented and could not bear hearing prayer ; and after some time the influences the poor creature was under, grew so outrageous and strong in her, that she on a sudden sprung out of the chair she sat in and leaped about the room crying out "I'll kill ye, I'll kill ye." Then we got her into her chair again, and kept her in it by holding of her, and when the person (that was then engaged) gave over praying (for he did not leave off when she raged so) it was said by her mouth "Now you have done, I will have done," and then she ceased to be in such a rage and was very calm.

After some discourse with her, they desired her to kneel down and to endeavour to join (in her desires) with them in their prayers, and she did kneel down with them, and two of them kneeled down, one on one side and the other on the other side, and each of them laid the hand next to her upon her, to help her to keep herself upon her knees, that she might not be raised up by that Power that acted against her will ; and then one of them prayed again, and when they prayed she was strangely stirred and had strange snatchings in her arms, and, as she said she was ready to be raised up, do what she could, yet the persons on each side helped her without much difficulty, though sometimes her knees were raised (as one of them said he thought) from the boards, but as they continued kneeling and praying and she and we with them, the Power that acted her grew weaker and weaker in her, and after some time there appeared to us nothing at all outwardly, she being neither lifted up, shook or snacked in her arms or head, etc., as before, but could continue kneeling with us in prayer as quietly as the rest. And when they ceased praying, they asked her, whether she felt anything of those workings within her still ? And she told them "No." Yet they prayed again, she kneeling down with them. And they afterward asked her again if she felt any remainder of the workings in her ? And she said "No" ; where-

upon they spent some time in endeavouring to give thanks unto God for his great mercy and then gave over.

This day also in the time that was spent in praying, reading and discoursing before they gave thanks, one of the persons desired that if the Lord should grant deliverance that day unto this poor creature, they might keep that day of the year in thanksgiving to God, as long as they lived; and to this the rest of them agreed, declaring their desires to do the same.

And from that day through the great goodness of God, she hath continued well as to those sore fits unto this time, though she was under some small disorders, and attended with some fears of their returning at some times for a short time afterwards, but hath been delivered from them also a long time and continueth well to this day, and that without the use of any other means but prayer, reading and hearing God's word.

For which we desire to praise God ourselves, and that you who are present would do the same with us on our behalf.

JOHN BALDWIN, the father.

JEREMIAH BALDWIN, the uncle.

The mark of X REBECCA BALDWIN, the
mother of the children.

Witness our hands Sept. 7th, 1706.

The separate statements of the parents are next given. John, the father, briefly states that Dr. Parker told him Rebecca was under an ill-tongue or that she was bewitched. Dr. Woodhouse and Dr. Boreman sagaciously confirmed this but expressed approval of the proposal to pray for the afflicted ones.

Rebecca, the mother, sets forth what the children told her which she naively adds "made me think our condition was worse than any bodies, and that we dwelt and were among the Devils." She tells of Mary's dual personality, how she could scarce fetch a Bible and when it was being read, interrupted with "Leave this chattering, I can't endure to hear it." At other times the girls both

kept whispering threats to kill themselves and they had to be watched when near the fire or by a pond, and when Mary was left at home alone, an Appearance suggested she might fire the house. Anne's remarks to the persons who came to pray for her were "I'll kill ye, I'll kill ye," all the while leaping about and distorting her features in an extraordinary way. Many other strange revilings did this poor girl utter when in her fits, but when normal she was also anxious to be prayed for. The father averred that he heard noises and saw lights, one like a shooting star, in the house, but his wife adds "I saw them not."

Elizabeth, the eldest daughter, who was happily free from the troubles which beset her sisters, narrates how Anne was very outrageous with her, threatening to kill her and at night something went about their chamber and leaped over her. She too, saw lights and heard noises, but did not witness what her sisters did.

Anne and Mary's statements are not given us, but we have that of Rebecca who suffered for two and a quarter years in all. She relates how it began with a great pain in her right side one Christmas Day, then came fainting fits followed by involuntary imitations of the farmyard. She narrates how she was strangely shaken and underwent painful physical contortions. She saw certain apparitions, both human and animal, and she quaintly adds the visionary persons rejoiced to see her mother in a passion. One such old woman the Appearance was like, died, and she adds "I saw her no more." Sometimes a thing like a boy caught her head, and beat it against the wall, making it ache sadly. One day she was "extraordinary bad," but upon her mother suggesting certain persons who should pray for her, she agreed, whereupon she was "very lightsome" (happy). The Appearances, "like shadows on the wall," then trembled as badly as she did and said "Now we shall be killed," then disappeared and she saw them no more until that day her sister Mary was delivered also.

We next have the testimonies of various friends of the Baldwins. William Brewer, of Sarret, testified that two of the

afflicted girls, one of whom was Mary, were at his house for three or four weeks to see if they would be any better from home. One Lord's Day he took Mary towards her father's house but she shook so he had to turn back. She spoke of the imps that threatened to drown her in the pond, otherwise while with him she seemed well.

Susanna Woodbridge, widow, of Sarret Green, who kept a school, next came forward. She stated that she had heard of their strange behaviour. She took them for a walk down a close into an orchard which she thought they were not acquainted with although in the direction of their home, but they fell to shaking and could not go forward. She thereupon turned back and then they seemed well.

John Wingfield, of Chipperfield, taylor, said that he and his servant were at work at the Baldwins and were witnesses to the delusions the girls suffered from and the fits in which they would fall down and lie as if dead.

Thomas Aldridge, of Tring, set forth (in a paper found after his decease on June 16, 1715) that Rebecca told him a strange story about some yeast designed for baking which found its way into three pans of milk, of course by supernatural means. Then the maid found her caps, bodice and stomacher all torn to pieces and later her head-cloths, handkerchief and black hood shared the same fate. She saw visions of a woman in her chamber, in the hall and in the drink-house (? cellar), in the latter place the vision had scissors with which she threatened to cut her gown.

She took comfort from the notorious Cotton Mather's "Trials of Witches in New England," which seems to have afforded her special consolation as it specified what bewitched persons should do under certain circumstances, which are duly set forth under six heads.

Aldridge next relates how he apparently saw certain destruction at the Baldwin's house, even the mother suffered by having her stocking and shoe ripped and cap cut. There were visions too like a crow or raven as well as of women, one of whom held two apples.

Further tearings of garments, gloves, petticoats, apron and gown took place whereupon the deponent advised recourse to a prayer meeting which was duly held on two separate dates, the effect of which we have seen.

Joseph Munn next sets forth an account he had from the father in June, 1715, in which we are told that the Evil One was present on the night of January 9th, 1714, and both Anne and Mary were sorely tormented by him. Then their brother Joseph sung the 103rd Psalm and he was also threatened by the Evil One whose remarks are all set down. The father adds the cheerful news that they had not heard anything of this nature since.

Thomas Burch and Joseph Munn, of Hemelhampsted, next add their testimony which is to the effect that at a prayer meeting held at the Baldwins, Rebecca's head-cloths were taken away and later brought back by the mysterious visitant termed "The Enemy." To this fact Susanna Woodbridge attests.

Richard Carter, of Chipperfield, is the last to give evidence. He conducted prayer meetings both at home and at the Baldwins on behalf of the distressed children and speaks of the manifestations he saw, swooning and sudden recovery, temporary blindness and dumbness, then raging and foaming. He also tells how Satan appeared in the shape of Mary who threatened to throw him in a pond on his way home, but needless to say, the threat, as in other cases, proved to be harmless. He narrates how it was declared to him by Rebecca and others who saw it, that Mary was taken sick and cast up "a piece of flesh like a piece of liver as large as a mouse," which "crawled away snivelling and crying as being very much discontented and several of the Appearances standing about said they could not meddle with any more and were no more seen."